

Old diseases learn new tricks, not phased by treatment

By Katherine Arnold
THE BATTALION

The recent outbreak of the plague in India has raised questions about the possibility of recurrences in the United States.

There are as many as 400 suspected cases of pneumonic plague in India. However, several of these are actually sicknesses such as tuberculosis and pneumonia.

Dr. David McMurray, a professor of medical microbiology and immunology at Texas A&M, has been conducting research on tuberculosis, which once plagued the United States.

At the turn of the century, tuberculosis was the number one killer of humans. Improvements in living standards and the advent of antibiotics helped to control the disease, McMurray said.

According to the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, eight million people contract tuberculosis and three million people die from it. In 1992, there were over 26,000 active cases of tuberculosis in the United States.

"So far we have discovered that the nutritional habits of the patient makes a difference," McMurray said. "We have also tested vaccines that consist of genetically engineered recombinant DNA."

Tuberculosis is a disease that targets the lungs. Patients suffer from a cough, fever, troubled breathing, and weight loss. Patients can be totally cured with antibiotics if the disease is caught early enough.

Janet Matthews, who works with the tuberculosis control program at the Brazos County Health Department, said a

person can contract the virus from a patient in which the virus is active.

"A person may be exposed to the virus from an active-state patient, but the virus remains inactive for a long time," Matthews said. "Within a year or two, when the defense systems finally break down, the person comes down with active tuberculosis."

The Brazos County Health Department created the tuberculosis control program because Texas is among the top six states with the highest rate of tuberculosis. The program attempts to increase awareness about tuberculosis symptoms.

Despite improved living conditions in the United States, Matthews said tuberculosis is resurging once again.

She said an increased number of HIV-infected individuals has caused tuberculosis to remain active, because the immune system of an HIV-infected person is more susceptible to infection.

Also, an increased number of immigrants from countries with high rates of tuberculosis accounts for cases still existing in the United States, she said. These countries include Mexico, Vietnam and some Asian countries.

Matthews said pockets of tuberculosis exist in the United States among certain areas of the general population, such as the homeless and the undernourished. Interaction with such groups can cause the disease to spread.

Researchers are still working to combat the disease. But doctors face new problems.

"We are seeing the appearance of resistance from the virus," McMurray said. "The old treatments aren't working anymore."

The virus develops an immunity to certain drugs, and those drugs are inef-

fective in treating tuberculosis, McMurray said.

"This is a fairly new development,"

McMurray said. "We've not seen this before."

The Health Department reported

that there have been no cases of tuberculosis in the Brazos Valley the past year.

Newest antibiotics rendered useless against bacteria before treatable but now resistant virus

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Germs resistant to antibiotics are spreading at an alarming rate in hospitals, and doctors fear pneumonia, blood infections and other ills will become impervious to anything medicine can now throw at them.

If this happens, routine ailments can become killers, especially among those whose bodies are already weakened by disease.

Nowhere is this problem more urgent than in hospitals, where the spread of infections has always been a big problem.

About 85 percent of the types of bacteria responsible for hospital-acquired infections have gradually developed resistance to common antibiotics, said Dr. Martin Favero of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

A study outlined Friday shows just how dramatically these medicines are losing their punch. Among the most worrisome problems is the emergence of common intestinal microbes called enterococci that are resistant to vancomycin, the main drug used against them.

Dr. Ronald N. Jones and others from the University of Iowa collected samples from 43 hospitals across the United States. They found that about 16 percent of enterococci can withstand vancomycin, and about half of these are also resistant to all the other primary antibiotics used against them — and even some drugs that have not been released yet for routine treatment.

Enterococci can cause life-threatening bloodstream and heart infections.

Of even more concern is the possibility that enterococci might pass their resistance on to other nasty microbes, such as staph bacteria, that doctors now stop with van-

comycin.

"This is a really terrifying potential," Jones said. The survey also showed that 18 percent of pneumonia bacteria, which cause pneumonia, are resistant to penicillin. Two-thirds of one variety of staphylococcus bacteria were resistant to ciprofloxacin, another common antibiotic.

Jones presented his findings at an infectious-disease conference sponsored by the American Society of Microbiology.

Antibiotic resistance is almost as old as the antibiotic era, which began in the early 1940s with the discovery of penicillin. Within a few years, doctors witnessed the evolution of microbes that were impervious to the medicine.

Microbes acquire genes that shield them from antibiotics. This happens either through random genetic mutations or by picking up a resistance gene from another strain of bacteria.

Over time, the resistant bacteria become dominant and their susceptible kin are killed off by antibiotics.

Overuse of these powerful drugs is often blamed for resistance. Critics complain of a "B-52 approach" by some doctors who blitz their patients with a battery of broad-based antibiotics, often when they are unsure exactly what is making them sick.

In hospitals, poor hygiene also appears to play a role and doctors and nurses are likely to be the carriers. They fail to wash their hands between each patient or after using the toilet.

"I've seen nurses disconnect tubing with their hands and reconnect them with subsequent infections," said Dr. Robert Weinstein of Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. He said patients should demand that hospital workers wash up before seeing them.

Hospital mega-merger

Columbia-HCA Healthcare Corp., the nation's largest hospital chain, is buying the second-largest, HealthTrust Inc. A look at the growing dominance of the two companies (locations are approximate):

- Columbia/HCA Hospitals
- ▲ HealthTrust Hospitals

Source: Columbia/HCA, HealthTrust Inc.

AP/Carl Fox

HEALTH TIPS

Health Fair to help students fair healthier

By Amy Clark
A.P. BEUTEL HEALTH CENTER

Do you know your cholesterol level? Have you had your blood pressure checked? What is your blood type, stress level or body composition? Have you been screened for glaucoma? Do you have questions about your health? Want to find out more about what is available on campus and in the community? Do you want to know more about health - physical, mental, social and spiritual?

If so, come to the Health Fair! On Wed, Oct. 12, A.P. Beutel Health Center at Texas A&M University will present "Discover Health," the 1994 Health and Wellness Fair. Literature, free screenings, entertainment and great prizes will be available. The Health Fair will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the main walkway and Flagroom of the MSC on campus.

The fair's goal is to promote physical, mental, social and spiritual health. The campus and community organizations will provide information on health issues to students, faculty, staff and the surrounding community that can help raise awareness and generate interest in healthy lifestyles. The information and services offered at the fair will benefit all who attend.

A variety of campus and community organizations will be represented at the fair. Some highlights include blood pressure screenings, glucose screenings, vision and glaucoma screenings, biofeedback and stress tests. Over 40 campus and community organizations will be represented at the fair, including:

- Aerofit Health and Fitness Center
- Aggies for Life
- Aggie R.E.A.C.H.
- American Red Cross Blood Services
- A.P. Beutel Health Center
- Brazos Animal Shelter
- BVCAA Family Health Services
- Brazos County Rape Crisis Center
- Brazos Valley Crisis Pregnancy Services
- Eta Sigma Gamma
- FitLife
- Health Promotion Program
- March of Dimes
- Mental Health/Mental Retardation
- Phoebe's Home
- Planned Parenthood of Brazos
- Texas A&M CDPE, The Rainbow Center
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10 P-MID CHEM 102	CHEM 102 CH 17	CHEM 102 CH 17, 18	CHEM 102 CH 18	CHEM 102 Practice Test

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